

i fought the law (and the law won) by maplemood

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“Hey, I’m not the one who said I had to be here.”

“And I’m not the one who spray painted a four-foot tall middle finger on Mrs. Gillespie’s shed.”

(Or, Max and Hopper bond over one of the chief’s favorite books.)

i fought the law (and the law won)

Author's Note:

Just a note, there is one use of the word "retard" in here; I didn't think it was enough to warrant the "Period-Typical Language" tag or anything, but let me know if you think otherwise!

"Finished the linear equations." Max slams her dog-eared pile of homework down on the chief's desk. She waits for him to look up, half a donut still between his lips, then cocks her head and asks, in her sweetest voice (which isn't, on second thought, all that sweet), "You do know what linear equations are, right?"

"Uh-huh. There's a holding cell with your name on it, kid," Hopper mumbles past the donut. He reaches for a pencil and pulls the top sheet off the pile. "Sit down."

He waves at the chair opposite his like he's shooin' off a dog, as usual. She ignores him, as usual. As usual, Hopper's eyes snap up five seconds later and he glares like he doesn't already know Max Mayfield is so much more trouble than she's worth.

She shrugs. "Hey, I'm not the one who said I had to be here."

"And I'm not the one who spray painted a four-foot tall middle finger on Mrs. Gillespie's shed," he growls, jabbing the pencil at her. "*Sit.*"

"Jackass," Max mutters.

Hopper waits.

She sits.

Though, fine, to be absolutely fair, the middle finger wasn't one of her better ideas. Max is woman enough to admit that, and smart enough—now—to know that knowing she wouldn't get away with it would've made a big difference when it first popped into her head. Apparently she fits an M.O. that's already well-known in Hawkins; it took Hopper all of a day to show up at Neil's door.

He thought Billy was the one behind it. Max hasn't gotten over the sick plunge her gut took as she fessed up, not because she was fessing up but because she had to face him while she did it. From demodogs to car rides with her stepbrother, it ranks up there with the worst experiences of her life.

She kind of hates him for it.

A fly buzzes through the air, lighting on the smeared typewriter keys. The pencil scribbles across her worksheet and Max grits her teeth.

Two weeks' worth of afternoons spent at the police station didn't seem all that bad, at first. She wasn't under the illusion that anything interesting would be going on, not in a town like Hawkins, but you never knew. Around the second week she might work up some heretofore unknown (to her, most of all) natural charm and convince the chief to take her on a ride-along. Hey, even scrubbing out a holding cell would be more interesting than what she does do, which is sit in Hopper's office and do homework. If he's out on a call, she sits at Flo's desk and does homework. Once she finishes, he gets her do something totally petty and unnecessary, like sweeping out the vestibule. And if she's really lucky, Max gets to walk across the street to pick up a fresh order of coffee.

The most annoying part, though, is none of those things. It isn't even the fact that Max hasn't once tried to make a break for it on her trips to the coffee shop. The part that makes her want to kill Hopper, and then maybe herself, is that he has to check over each of her assignments as soon as she finishes them. Like she's some kind of retard.

Another scribble. See?

"I hope you know what you're doing," she says, still keeping her voice to a mutter. She drums her fingers on the edge of the desk. "'Cause I'm not planning on flunking out of algebra."

"Well, I live in hope," Hopper says flatly before shooting another glare at her tapping fingers. "Quit it."

She's pretty sure *he* flunked out of algebra. The problem here, aside

from him being a total asshole, is that Hopper isn't as good at math as he thinks he is. He'll mark half her problems wrong, and Max will push the paper right back to him because she knows they're right, and then they'll get out the calculator and go to battle. Sometimes Flo or Officer Powell will get involved; other times Steve, who's been shadowing a whole bunch of policemen since graduating from high school (but Hopper most of all, like the man's such a joy to be around) will try to tell them that they're both wrong, and then things get *really* interesting.

Too bad he isn't here today. Mostly Steve pulls up a chair next to her and cracks jokes. Lamé ones, but at least he's fun. At least Max doesn't feel that prickling, awful mix of anger and shame burning under her skin whenever she looks at him.

Her eyes dart away from Hopper, still working his way down the paper, and to the mess spread across his desk. Files, mostly. But also receipts and takeout boxes and the forgotten half of his donut—Jesus. She knows adults can be slobes just the same as kids, but you'd think a police chief might take a little pride in his workspace.

Max opens her mouth, then closes it. All he needs is an excuse to tell her to clear it off herself. There's a pile of books buried under a stack of files; she focuses on those instead.

Cujo. The Shining. No surprises there. She tilts her head to read the next couple of titles. *Gorky Park. National Velvet. Anne of Green Gables.*

Max straightens. "Those are El's, right?"

"Huh?"

She rolls her eyes. "I'm just assuming you're not the one who checked out *Anne of Green Gables*."

Hopper looks up. "One of my favorites," he says, completely deadpan; she's halfway through a real prize winner of a snort when she realizes he means it and nearly chokes.

Her eyes tear up and everything. "You're shitting me!" Max wheezes.

He doesn't smack her on the back, like Mr. Sinclair would, or yell "Language!" like Mr. Wheeler. Hopper does take all of a second to flick his eyes over her, make sure she's not actually on the way to being struck dead by the fact, before leaning back, fingers laced over his chest. "You can't say the same?"

"No way." She shakes her head. "I've never read it."

From his expression, she can't tell if Hopper's given up on her or on the world in general. "You need to lay off that fantasy crap. Try some real literature."

"What, like *Cujo*?" she snaps.

For some reason that seems to tick him off more than anything else she's said today. "Kid, you've got a mouth on you," Hopper snaps back, pulling himself up straight. His chair groans. "Fine. Guess that's what I get for trying to start some civil conversation."

"Civil"? Like you even know what that means. And *Earthsea* isn't crap," Max adds hotly. "They're modern classics!"

"Wizards and dragons. Don't you get enough of that shit in real life?"

"Why do you care? And am I just supposed to like Anne of Green Gables because she has red hair? That's sexist."

He growls like a pissed-off bear. "Maybe it's time to quit throwing around words when you don't know what they really mean."

"Hello, if you're saying all red-headed girls must like *Anne of Green Gables*, then you're being sexist. I'm just calling it as I see it! Hear it, whatever." Max crosses her arms and slouches back in her chair exactly like he did, which she knows pisses Hopper off even more. "What makes it so great, anyway?"

She isn't sure what she's hoping to get out of him with that. The chief growls again, then half-rises, like he's getting ready to reach across the desk. To actually clobber her this time. In a flash, Max is on her feet.

But he's only reaching for the book. "Fuck," Hopper grunts, barely

under his breath, as he tries sliding it out of the teetering pile. “Help me out here,” he grumbles after a minute, so she steadies the pile while he grabs the book.

Hopper brushes donut crumbs off the edges of the cover. “Here,” he says, shoving it at her.

“Think I’ll stick with Stephen King,” Max says.

“Not an option.” He’s still holding it out, and, ugh, it’d be awkward not to grab it at this point.

“Well, if it’s your favorite, it’d better have a bunch of shoot-ups. Or some sex scenes.” She plunks down on her chair. Max knows enough about *Anne of Green Gables* to know better than that—it’s worth it for the look on Hopper’s face.

“It’d better not be boring,” she says.

“Just shut up and read,” he answers, settling back into his chair and picking up his pencil. “I’ve had about enough of you for one day.”

“Asshole,” Max whispers.

I didn’t ask to be here.

But she is here, for another hour, no less. With nothing better to do. Max sighs, then flips to the front page.

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At six p.m. on the dot Hopper grunts, stretches, stubs out his second cigarette, and stands up. Max hears the rustle of papers and the click of the typewriter cover sliding into place. Another rustle as he grabs his coat.

She doesn’t move.

“Hey. Kid.” His shadow falls over the page, blotting out the words. Max scowls. When she cranes her neck around to look up at him (somewhere halfway through chapter one she swiveled sideways in her seat, throwing both legs over one armrest) he’s already got his

hat on and her jacket dangling from one hand.

“Time to go.”

“I’m almost done with this chapter.”

This time his glare almost looks halfhearted. “Now.”

“Mrs. Lynde’s going to be kind of bitch, isn’t she?”

His hand drops to her shoulder. “The book’ll be here tomorrow. Now put it back on my desk and move it.”

The squeeze to her shoulder isn’t unfriendly, but it also brooks no argument. Max packs her homework into her backpack and snatches her jacket back.

“You forgot about the linear equations,” she says.

“Guess they’ll have to wait until tomorrow, too.”

“In your dreams.” She sweeps her hair out of her collar. “You don’t get to torture me just because you never made it to Math Olympiad.”

Flo’s by the door, waiting for them to clear out before she goes home herself. Max smiles at her; some days Flo is about the only person in the building she can stand. She’s like Max’s grandma, if Gramma Mayfield only swore about half as much as she usually does.

“You two going to make it home all right?” Flo asks. She isn’t talking about the roads.

“Yeah, don’t worry.” Hopper holds the door open for her, then waves Max through, too. “We were both just sick of algebra.”

His truck’s a mess, same as his desk. Max tosses her school stuff in the back before clambering into the front seat. She brushes a burger wrapper onto the floor.

“Some diet, chief.”

He swats at her head.

Normally, he drives Max straight home. They exchange approximately four words each, and she's left in her driveway, sullen, tongue-tied, wondering how she can face Hopper for another nine days, another eight, another seven. This time around he doesn't seem in any hurry to back out of his parking space.

"Come on," she says, crossing her ankles on the dash. "Places to be? Things to do?"

He moves to slot his keys into the ignition. He stops.

"I shouldn't have called those *Earthsea* books crap," he says.

She chews at her tongue. "They're really good."

He's trying again. Civil conversation. Which neither of them really knows jack about, but he's *trying*.

"I don't get why you kids want more of it. More than all the out-of-this-world shit we've already got."

The ignition rumbles. Max turns on him.

"How is Stephen King different?"

Hopper cuts his eyes at her. Sometimes she thinks his face is nothing but frown lines. "He's not," he admits.

"You're just an elitist."

"First time anybody's called me that." Maybe there's a laugh in his voice, an edge of warmth. He backs out, head turned, his free arm braced against the headrest of Max's seat. (She's not imagining that arm looped around her shoulders now. No way.)

"Your folks need you back by a certain time?" Hopper asks once they've rolled out of the parking lot.

Her tongue feels raw. She can't quit chewing it. "They don't care."

"Well—" he sounds reluctant. "El and I were going to head over to Joyce's for dinner. Meatloaf, I think. That sound good to you?"

“Are you going soft or something?” Max can’t help but snipe, because this is what they do, even if it’s not what they want to do. “Meatloaf wasn’t part of my deal.”

Hopper grunts. “Yeah, yeah, sweetheart. Don’t test me”

El, he calls El sweetheart. Nobody else, and definitely not Max. She swallows.

“Yeah,” she says, like her brain’s been screaming at her to all along. “It’s better than what I’ll get at home, anyway.”

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Next afternoon, after she says hi to Flo and Powell and Callahan, and that creepy Bauman guy who’s thankfully on his way out, Max stumps into Hopper’s office to see a stack of paperbacks lined up on the edge of his desk like brightly-colored candies. *Anne of Green Gables*. *Anne of Avonlea*. *Anne of the Island*.

“I’m not finished with *Green Gables* yet,” she says.

He’s typing up a report. “So get to work.”

Max decides she’s better off not mentioning the algebra. She slings down her backpack and grabs the book, but as interesting (and, okay, *good*) as it is, she can’t focus. Not while Hopper keeps banging away.

Or while she remembers the drive home last night, when El took the passenger seat and she dozed off in the back, only really waking up halfway to the stoop, with his hands on her shoulders, guiding her along.

She’s staring at him. Max realizes this around the same time Hopper does; the typing stops.

“What?”

She shrugs.

“I don’t have all day, kid.”

So the sweetheart thing was temporary. Max swallows her disappointment and says, "Why's it your favorite? You still haven't told me."

"If you've got to ask, you haven't read far enough." He goes right back to hunting and pecking.

Asshole.

Hopper stares down at the typewriter. Something in his who-spit-in-my-coffee-this-morning face flickers, like he's toeing the edge of a major decision.

Max waits.

He says, his frown softening, "It was my girl's favorite book."

El? she doesn't ask. The whole Party knows about Sara by now, not that any of them have asked him; only El really knows the details. She can't believe he's telling her this. Never, not in a million or a billion years, would Max peg herself as the one to get even an extra smidge of information about his daughter.

It makes a hard rock block her throat, a feeling worse than all her prickling shame.

It almost makes her want to cry.

"Some books—" He looks pissed, not so much at her as at himself for stumbling over the words. "—they get so mixed up with the people you first read them with—"

"My dad read me all three *Earthsea* books," Max interrupts. If she doesn't, she really might start sniffing. "When I was, like, six. I know," she says, gripping the paperback in her lap.

Hopper stays quiet for a long time. Honestly, for ages. Somehow it doesn't feel any more awkward than usual.

"You're a good kid," he finally says.

"Oh, yeah." She sounds nasty. Always so awful to him—why is she

always so awful to him? “Juvvie, here I come.”

“Don’t do that,” he growls.

“Do what?”

“All this me-against-the-world bullshit. It doesn’t suit you. Doesn’t suit anybody,” Hopper snaps, going at the typewriter like it’s a game of whack-a-mole. “You’ve got a good thing going in this town. Kids like you. Most of the parents do, too. Hell, the Sinclairs would adopt you if they could.” He glances up, his eyes shooting right through Max. “Don’t wreck it all because you’re pissed at some crazy woman who doesn’t know what the hell she’s talking about.”

The rock swells to a boulder. Max prays he hasn’t noticed the sudden uptick in her blinking. “Mrs. Gillespie’s a bitch,” she snarls.

It comes out all wrong. Soggy. She twists around in the chair, hooks her legs over the armrest, nearly rips off *Anne’s* cover as she folds it open. Tries to read, but all she can do is bite her lip and clench her shoulders, shut herself off from the look she knows he’s giving her, the one that was painted all over his face when she came clean, sharp, pissed, more than that—

Disappointed.

His chair creaks. Max hears him squeeze out from behind his desk, feels him at her side like she does at the end of every day. She doesn’t turn around.

Why can’t she hate him? Just hate, and not bother with all the other bullshit? The books. The civil conversation. The meatloaf. His hands on her shoulders, pushing her towards home.

It would make everything so much easier.

“You understand the next time I hear that I’ll have to do something about it.”

Max rubs her nose. “Bite me.”

“You’re a good kid,” Hopper repeats. Not like he’s trying to convince

her or anything. Like he doesn't need to. Like it's a fact.

She traces a finger across the book cover, over Anne's carrotty curls. "I'm not like her," she says. Hello, where did that come from? Whatever. She stumbles on. "I'm not sweet."

Hopper snorts. "There's a lot more to being good than being sweet," he says, in that dry tone she hates and doesn't.

"Guess you'd know all about that," Max says.

"Watch it. And Anne's not as sweet as you think, either."

"Really?" She finally twists her head to look at him, knowing she sounds stupidly eager and too eager to care.

"You bet." He reaches out to ruffle her hair with one bear-sized paw. "Keep reading, sweetheart."

Author's Note:

1.) Title from "I Fought the Law". There are quite a few covers of this song, but the one I was listening to while I wrote this was the version by The Bobby Fuller Four.

2.) In the 80s, only three of Earthsea books had been published; my personal headcanon is that Max's favorite is *The Tombs of Atuan*. I feel like she'd *really* identify with Tenar.

3.) On that note, as much as I love Stephen King, it kind of cracks me up that Max would call Jim an elitist for preferring him to Ursula K. Le Guin.